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ABSTRACT

EXTREME GESTURES AND SUBLIME PROVOCATION IN THE PERFORMATIVE ART OF ORLAN AND DANIEL JOSEPH MARTINEZ

By

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Modernism ushered in a whole new approach to art making, one that insisted on ingenuity and questioned previous modes of art production, commodity, and exhibition. This approach helped to inform postmodern art practices, such as performance art and its sister disciplines, including body art, happenings, actions, and interventions. With these new genres, the artist's performing body, anchored by a set of ideas, became the new canvas and a discursive medium. This resulted in the literal conflation of artist and artwork.

This thesis will consider two performative art series from contemporary artists ORLAN and Daniel Joseph Martinez. Even though their art practices could be situated under the umbrella of performance art, their art defies easy categorization. Intuiting this, they have each designated a specific name to better define their art. French artist ORLAN calls her work Carnal Art, so as to distinguish it from body art. Chicano artist Daniel Joseph Martinez calls his work Poetic Terrorism and identifies himself as a tactical media practitioner. Nonetheless, they both recognize “a specific debt to Herman Nitsch and the Viennese "Aktionismus" group that developed in the '60s—artists who startled spectators with their ritualistic staged imitations of blood sacrifices” (Rose, 1993, ¶ 22), and in particular the actions by fellow Viennese Actionist Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who staged performances for the camera.

The series to be considered are ORLAN's *La réincarnation de Saint-Orlan*, 1990 – 1993, and Martinez's *More Human than Human* photographic cycle, 1999 – 2001. In these two series, ORLAN and Martinez produce transgressive art that are reifications of the texts that helped to inform them. In both instances, the artists have used their own body in tactical and extreme gestures resulting in captivating and thought-provoking pictures.

Despite some basic shared characteristics, where they depart is where their art flourishes. Investigating these two series will unfold two examples of very diverse tactics utilized by artists who seek to convey strong concepts that are “not propaganda but aesthetic shock-appallingly direct yet also subtly angled-- action-as-metaphor” (Bey, 2003, p. 12). And, especially true in Martinez's work, to “Smash the symbols of the Empire in the name of nothing but the heart's longing for grace” (Bey, 2003, pp. 12-13).